

February 12, 2003

Dear Administrator Dr. Runge,

I am disappointed that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is proposing only a modest change in fuel economy standards for SUVs, pickups and minivans. The administration's proposal to raise the fuel economy of these light trucks by 1.5 mpg between 2005 and 2007 falls below what some automakers have already pledged to meet voluntarily and is significantly lower than what is technologically feasible. When NHTSA's proposal is combined with the auto industry-supported loopholes in current law, gains in fuel economy and real oil savings are all but wiped out.

The National Academy of Sciences has concluded that the technology exists to raise the fuel economy of light trucks significantly from the current 20.7 mpg average standard. Additional analysis indicates that a 35 mpg light truck average is possible within the next ten years. NHTSA should set fuel economy goals and timelines that are aimed at achieving the highest fuel economy for light trucks possible. It is clear that the auto industry could be providing consumers with trucks that can go much farther on a gallon of gas while maintaining safety and performance.

As the administration prepares for a possible war in the Middle East, the negligible fuel economy target set by NHTSA is irresponsible. The administration is squandering an important opportunity to put us on the road to real energy independence and to save Americans millions at the gas pump each year. As it stands, the administration's proposal seems to reflect deals negotiated with industry instead of a good faith effort to require that the automakers employ existing technology to improve the fuel economy of light trucks for the sake of America's energy security, consumers and the environment. I urge you to reconsider this proposal.

Sincerely,

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